CLAIMS

1. A liquid food product containing particles of dehydrated lactic acid bacteria coated with at least one vegetable fat that is solid at ambient temperature, wherein said coated bacteria are in the form of granules having an average size of between 95 and 300 μm containing lactic acid bacteria in an amount greater than or equal to 1×10^{10} CFU per gram of granules, in that said granules are free of starch, and in that said food product has a pH of less than or equal to 4.5 and a water content by weight of at least 83%.

2. The food product as claimed in claim 1, wherein the average size of the granules of lactic acid bacteria particles is less than 200 μm.

3. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the average size of the granules of lactic acid bacteria particles is between 150 and 200 μm.

4. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein it is in the form of a fermented milk or of a beverage.

5. The food product as claimed in claim 4, wherein the beverage is a fruit juice, a mixture of milk and of fruit juice or a vegetable juice.

6. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the lactic acid bacteria are chosen from lactobacilli and bifidobacteria.

7. The food product as claimed in claim 6, wherein the lactic acid bacteria are chosen from *Lactobacillus casei, Lactobacillus plantarum, Bifidobacterium animalis* and *Bifidobacterium breve*.

8. The food product as claimed in claim 7, wherein the lactic acid bacterium is a *Lactobacillus casei* I-1518.

9. A food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the lactic acid bacteria are dehydrated by lyophilization prior to them being granulated.

10. The food product as claimed in claim 9, wherein the bacteria are treated with a lyoprotectant prior to them being lyophilized.

11. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the particles of dehydrated bacteria have an average size of between 80 and 150 μm.

12. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the particles of dehydrated bacteria have a water activity of less than 0.25.

13. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the vegetable fats used for coating the particles of dehydrated bacteria are chosen from hydrogenated and nonhydrogenated, fractionated or unfractionated, esterified or nonesterified substances, food waxes, fatty acids, and mixtures thereof.

14. The food product as claimed in claim 13, wherein the vegetable fats are chosen from palm stearic oil with a melting point (Mp) = 35°C, palm oils with an Mp of 45°C and 58°C, cocoa butter, peanut butter, palm kernel oil, hydrogenated coconut oil with an Mp = 32°C, carnauba wax with an Mp = 80-85°C, microcrystalline wax of petroleum origin, stearic acid, palmitic acid, and mixtures thereof.

15. The food product as claimed in claim 14, wherein the vegetable fats used for coating the particles of dehydrated bacteria are chosen from those which have a melting point above 40°C.

16. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the concentration of dehydrated lactic acid bacteria in the granules is greater than or equal to 1×10^{10} CFU per gram of granules, and a maximum of 5×10^{11} CFU per gram of granules.

17. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein said granules have a water activity of less than 0.4.

18. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the fat(s) represent(s) from 40% to 75% by weight relative to the total weight of the granules.

19. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the concentration of coated lactic acid bacteria is between 5×10^{6} and 5×10^{9} CFU per gram of finished product.

20. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the food product contains at least 90% of water.

21. The food product as claimed in claim 1 wherein the amount of granules of dehydrated lactic acid bacteria particles is less than 2% by weight relative to the total weight of finished product.

22. The food product as claimed in claim 21, wherein the amount of granules of dehydrated lactic acid bacteria particles is between 0.01% and 1% by weight relative to the total weight of finished product.